

# Our Government Goes Into the Drygoods Business

## Uncle Sam Sets Up for Himself in Nineteenth Street --- Does a Flourishing Business

THE United States Army may be a trifle slow in getting started, being like other ponderous and powerful bodies that way, but when it does commence moving it travels with speed and effect. They found that out in France, at St. Nazaire and other places, where the natives would wake up in the morning and find some of their best vacant lots covered with warehouses. They found that out also in New York, where the city awoke one morning to find one of the few of its huge empty buildings filled with a large retail store, with the old United States Army as proprietor and manager.

Most people were searching the city unsuccessfully for two rooms or one in which to deposit themselves and their goods about the time that Colonel J. M. Carson, zone supply officer, was scanning building interiors for a place to start a store. He managed to find eleven vacant floors at 22 West Nineteenth Street, with about 110,000 square feet in all, when hundreds were putting their goods in storage and taking rooms at hotels because of their inability to find apartments. Colonel Carson is as proud of his house-hunting as he is about any other single phase of the project which he has so successfully launched.

The war's sudden end had left mountains of socks, underwear, arctics, blankets, gloves, leggings and overalls with nobody to wear them. While the majority of the 4,800,000 fighting men were melting away into the mufti life these huge stores of drygoods and clothing remained in the gloomy depths of some warehouse, a nation's liability.

War Department officials cogitated, as War Department officials do, at length and with great attention to detail on the best way to dispose of this material. They finally determined to establish a huge retail store, government owned and run, in the central community of each of the thirteen army supply zones.

### Nine Days' Wonder

The determination was reached in the last dates of September, but the real order to go ahead and set up a selling organization was not forthcoming until September 18. The plans were perfected, the building whipped into retail store shape, the selling, checking, packing, financial, policing and other organizations were moulded and the arti-



The grand opening was a signal for crowds to form

cles for sale were installed in just nine days. Captain Jaffrey Peterson, working under the direction of Colonel Carson, was chiefly responsible for the celerity and efficiency of the arrangements.

It was not known, on the night of September 25, whether or not the swift and effectual preparations were to be rewarded with the public's patronage.

Captain Peterson worked until 5 o'clock in the morning of the opening day, wheeling a hand truck, carrying goods from the motor trucks outside into the store. He said that his handling of the truck had the same effect on his men as has the shouldering of a regulation pack by an officer on a long march. Nobody has the courage to let up then, he said. He took a short nap when the sun was just beginning to break through and he slept for three hours on a pile of army blankets. He was awakened, he said, by the kind of noise which comes from stadiums at football games. It was rumbling and rising. He looked out of the window and saw a crowd which the reporters agreed was made up of 20,000 persons who wanted to buy army things and wanted to buy them badly.

The captain climbed out on a small balcony on the second floor and attempted to address the potential customers. He told the people that the place didn't open until 11 in the afternoon; that it was a semi-permanent affair and the best stuff hadn't arrived yet, and that the people were blocking the traffic and gumming up the business of the neighborhood. About 2,000 went away, but the remainder hung close to the place where goods were to be sold at from 20 to 50 per cent below the regular market prices. The customers were allowed in at the



Captain Peterson, who established the nine days' wonder

rate of 500 at a time, but even with this precaution against congestion it was only the strong man who could exercise any kind of choice in selecting his articles.

The store really is a nine days' wonder, when its receipts, personnel and appointments are considered. It does an average daily business of \$21,000, catering to 8,000 customers in less than eight hours. Few retail stores do a yearly business of \$6,000,000, which is the per annum income rate of the government's venture to date.

### Organization

The first eight days following the receipt of the order to establish the



Ex-service men go right on serving, and they make very efficient clerks

store were consumed in the organization of the various departments, the designation of functions for each, the selection of the personnel, the erection of counters and storerooms and the mobilizing of the necessary furniture and fire prevention equipment.

Colonel Carson and Captain Peterson determined to use some of the army's released man power in the running of the store. They applied to Major Warren Bigelow, in charge of the Reemployment Bu-



The crowds are perfectly orderly, but the "keep moving" slogan is useful all the same

reau for Soldiers, Sailors and Marines, and obtained the services of over 700 wearers of the Victory buttons, more than one-third wearing the silver kind. Three hundred were assigned to salesmen's jobs, seventy to the mail order department, fifty to the financial department and fifty to the executive offices. The remainder were detailed to perform laborers', porters' and policing functions.

About the time of the opening of the store, Luna Park at Coney Island was being boarded up for the winter, leaving a large staff of cashiers and other girls jobless. Captain Peterson corralled thirty-five of these women and installed them as cashiers and queens of each counter, to which eight salesmen of them with hands calloused and gnarled with a year or more of a doughboy's work, were detailed. They were taught the triplicate checking system in one day, given some training as salesmen on another and were primed for their work when the first rush of patronage flooded the place. One husky youth was assigned to each counter to wrap the bundles.

To facilitate the passage of the stream of customers through the store a system of one-way aisles and stairways was worked out, with men, most of them former M. P.'s in France, acting as traffic cops. Two of the four stairways were opened only to those climbing up after bargains, while two others were set aside for the weary, bundle-laden shoppers homeward bound.

Newspapers, packages and umbrellas must be checked at the door on entering the store. They are returned when the customer departs. No bundle may be carried out un-

less it has been stamped by the wrapper. A bull-necked youth at the only exit examines every package carried away.

Captain Peterson has organized a secret service system to detect shoplifters and dealers attempting to obtain stocks for reselling. One man was observed in the act of jaiming two pairs of socks into his pocket, but when he was apprehended it was found that his own socks were worn to shreds and were cutting his feet. He was released at the order of Captain Peterson and when he reached the sidewalk he found the two pairs of socks in his pocket, duly stamped. Some doughboy had stood treat.

### Good for Three Months

The store will be continued in operation for three months at least, according to Captain Peterson. He based this estimate on the amount of goods held by the government here and the daily sales at the store. In a single day an average of 5,000 pairs of socks, 4,000 suits of underwear, 4,000 towels and 2,000 blankets are sold. Women are in evidence chiefly dur-

## Vast Stock of War Supplies Helps Solve the H. C. of L. Problem for New York

ing the middle of the day, but toward evening male workers take advantage of the opportunity to cut the cost of living.

The transportation from the army storehouses to the sales depot is in the hands and vehicles of the Motor Transport Corps. Up to 5 o'clock on the evening before the store was thrown open to the public not a single article had been delivered. At that hour a fleet of motor trucks laden until their springs creaked moved quietly into West Nineteenth Street. Within an hour, fifty were lined up along the curbing in the neighborhood of the store, while powerful muscles were straining to empty the trucks to make room for more.

A postal sub-station has been established in the building as part of the mail order department. This division is thriving beyond all expectations. People living in greater New York must make their purchases personally, but residents of the other sections of this zone, which includes New York State south of Schenectady, New Jersey and Connecticut, may order by mail. Orders are being executed in a single day.

To assure every householder an opportunity of obtaining some of the goods, quantities to each customer are limited. Four pairs of socks, which range in price from 50 cents a pair for heavy woolen ones to 5 cents a pair for those of reclaimed cotton, are the most which may be purchased by one customer. Blankets are limited to two to a customer. The price of these varies from two for \$1 to \$6 each, the latter being new woolen coverings. No more than three suits of underwear may be taken away by a single customer.

### Gas Masks, Too

The assortment of goods is by no means restricted to drygoods. Gas masks, used, \$1 each; goggles at 75 cents, flagstuffs, shovels and tools are also on sale in heaping quantities and at extremely low prices. Foodstuffs will be placed on sale next week, a varied assortment of canned goods being the first series of articles offered.

In building up a \$6,000,000-a-year business in nine days the social side of the enterprise was overlooked. But now a band is in the making, with several musicians who once played in competition with the music of angry artillery already competing for places. A women's rest room is being installed, while the restaurant privilege has just been given to a man who promises to keep the prices down to a reachable minimum.

# Is Ye Old Coffee House, Replacing the Saloon, Becoming a Scarlet Dive?

THE coffee house to take the place of the saloon, and if so, is it to fall heir to the vices that put the liquor parlor on the toboggan?

The suggestion that men may have convivial gatherings around the Mocha and Java as in days of yore is not a new one, but it is with something of a shock that those idealists who had hoped to revive forums for the discussion of art and literature and economics find many of our existing coffee houses falling into disrepute because of gambling and immorality.

Here in New York it was only a few weeks ago that Police Inspector William F. Boettler and his men swooped down on coffee houses on the lower East Side where "stuss" games were in operation. In the Russian and Rumanian coffee houses along Grand and Houston streets and St. Mark's Place gambling has long been an institution, and the police pay their occasional respects to the proprietors.

But in some of the industrial centres of the Middle West we learn that another vice is finding shelter in the coffee house, now that the saloon has passed, or is passing, into history.

### Out West

"The St. Paul Pioneer-Press" declares that the coffee house has taken the place of the saloon dive

and low cabaret in the underworld of Cleveland and other cities. According to Police Prosecutor Edward Stanton, young girls are held practically as slaves in these resorts, and are bought and sold by the proprietors.

"These girls are placed in coffee houses," says Mr. Stanton, according to that newspaper, "in the guise of waitresses, but are compelled to lead immoral lives, dividing profits with the owner of the coffee house to which they are assigned."

Quoting further from "The St. Paul Pioneer-Press" we learn that—

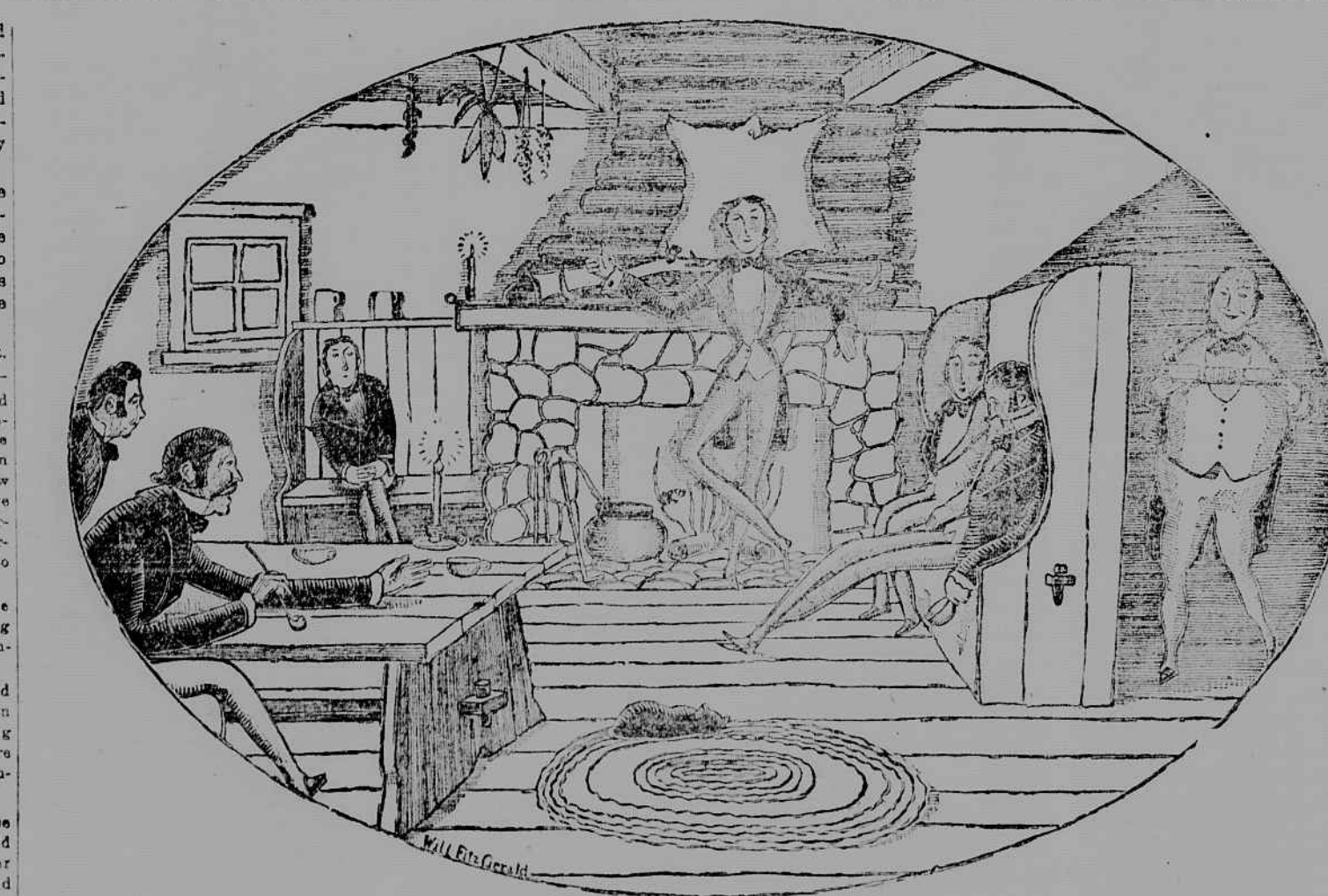
"A well dressed, expensively jeweled woman, labelled by the police of Cleveland and Detroit 'queen of the coffee house vice trust,' has been arrested in the effort to break the vice ring now operating in coffee houses which have sprung up in districts where the foreign population is heaviest. Many former saloons have been made over into coffee houses."

"Prosecutor Stanton accuses the vice ring of buying, selling and exchanging young girls, forcing them to live immorally in coffee houses."

"Many coffee houses in Cleveland have been closed by the police within the last two weeks. Others are being watched, and wherever young girls are employed as waitresses girls and owners are questioned."

"A girl taken from a coffee house owned by Mrs. Sophia Fodor testified that a coffee house owner had sold her to the Fodors for \$7. Mrs. Fodor and her husband were arrested."

"The old vice ring which used to operate in large cities through the medium of liquor resorts, saloons, wine



Shades of Addison and Steele! How has the mighty coffee house fallen from its estate of a century ago!

—Detroit Sunday News.

rooms and vicious cabarets is now attempting to come back with the aid of coffee houses, according to the police.

"Thus far the coffee houses have appeared in foreign districts, and foreigners have been the owners. They have the appearance of being respectable places, where coffee is sipped by men and women. There is no entertainment, and seldom is anything other than coffee served. Usually there is noted an overabundance of waitresses, mostly young and good looking. Men waiters are not employed, and the patronage of women coffee drinkers is not encouraged in these places, the police assert."

"Prosecutor Stanton believes that many mysteries of missing girls will be cleared up when the coffee house evil has been wiped out."

Shades of Addison and Steele! How has the mighty coffee house fallen from its estate in England of a century ago! And even our own American coffee houses have changed, as can be judged from this picture given us by Marjorie Elaine Porter, in "The Detroit Sunday News":

"During the English occupation, whenever the Indians gave the British officers a few minutes' breathing space, the redcoats would gather at a little place of refreshment in the village, called the Fleur de Lis. Here mine host, a genial Canadian known as Master François, and his dark eyed daughter, Babette, waited upon the officers of old Fort Pontchartrain."

"As for the purely American coffee house in old Detroit, in time it became a very popular institution. There were several of them that were actually fa-

mous and known for miles around as the haunts of certain cronies. Among the most famous of these were the old Ten Eyck Tavern, the Bates Street Coffee House and Cliff's, or 'The Old Yellow Tavern'."

"The old Bates Street Coffee House was one of the show places of the city in the old days. Distinguished visitors were always taken there for a bird supper and to meet the boys."

"There were also other smaller coffee houses in Detroit in the old days, and each was frequented by its own particular clique."

"But the coffee house, as an institution, had its own distinct place in the Detroit of the past."

"Will it regain that place in Detroit of the future?"

"Prohibition has placed its taboo on the saloon, but it seems nothing can interfere with the coffee house."

"It may be that some great mind will discover a newer and more modern substitute for the saloon as time goes on. But, as history shows, it met the requirements of a meeting place where men in all walks of life could find companionship once—so why not again? In modern times the army canteen huts have approached the idea of the coffee house. Men were entirely satisfied with them, and enjoyed the doughnuts and coffee."

"Strictly speaking, Detroit does not possess any coffee houses at the present time, except for a few in a certain foreign quarter where men gather to talk politics; but places such as Ten Eyck Tavern and the Bates Street Coffee House do not exist. In the future, however, poor old history may repeat herself again, and local celebrities of years to come may seek inspiration in new and improved coffee houses."